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SUCCESS STORY

Shari'ah integrated into Muslim Mindanao's Plan for Sustainable Forests

Local religious beliefs and cultural norms integrated into Muslim Mindanao's Forestry Law



ARMM Regional Government and DENR officials at a signing ceremony to commemorate the implementation of sustainable forestry practices in the ARMM

The integration of *Shari'ah* and other cultural norms in the Muslim Mindanao's Sustainable Forest Management Act was a first in the history of forest management legislation in the Philippines.

In the Philippines, enforcing the law has sometimes been a difficult task. This is due, in part, to the fact that many laws do not reflect the cultural values or social norms prevailing in local communities. Laws or ordinances that ignore the people's traditional way of life and religious beliefs can result in conflict.

To mitigate conflict and show respect for local religious beliefs, USAID/Philippines' Environmental Governance (EcoGov) Project worked closely with officials from the Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao (ARMM) to adopt a Regional Sustainable Forest Management Act (RSFMA). The ARMM comprises five provinces and one city in Mindanao where poverty is widespread and the use of critical natural resources like forests is often unchecked and can lead to conflict.

The EcoGov Project promotes the principles of transparency, accountability, and participatory decision making as integral parts of good environmental governance. EcoGov worked closely with the ARMM's Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA) to tap Filipino Muslim legal specialists, social scientists, and indigenous peoples' leaders to develop the RSFMA and its implementing rules and regulations (IRR).

Informed by extensive local consultations, the RSFMA's key features include incorporation of principles found in Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) and customary laws (*Adat*), as well as a multi-sectoral, community-based approaches to sustainable forest management.

The RSFMA will empower local communities to address the destruction and degradation of forestlands and gives ARMM inhabitants, including indigenous peoples, preferential rights to use critical forest resources they depend upon.

"On behalf of the people of Tawi-Tawi, we should be happy and proud (of the RSFMA), because this is the first time that (this consultation) actually happened in our province."

*- Vice Governor Hadji Jilkasi Usman
Province of Tawi-Tawi*